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JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD

IN HIS Introduction to his *Readings in St. John's Gospel* Archbishop Temple says: "The only Christ for whose existence there is any evidence at all is a miraculous Figure making stupendous claims." This sets the background against which our study of this subject must be set.

It is natural that in considering our subject we should pay special attention to St. John's Gospel, because towards its close the purpose of the Gospel is stated: "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (xx. 31). The opening words of this Gospel, "In the beginning", take up the opening of the Book of Genesis. Archbishop Temple points out that by the use of the word *Logos* St. John establishes common ground with all his readers. To the Jews it was familiar; they remembered that "by the Word of the Lord were the heavens made"; it was the Word that came by the prophets. Throughout the Old Testament the Word of the Lord God was a familiar doctrine. To the Greeks, the idea of *Logos*, the principle of law and reason, was also familiar. It had been taken up by the Stoics, and used by Philo of Alexandria, the Platonising Jew. As the Archbishop expresses it:

The Evangelist is not here proclaiming unfamiliar Truth; rather he is seeking common ground for all his readers. . . . He finds it in this word *Logos*, which, alike for Jew and Gentile, represents the ruling fact of the Universe, and represents that fact as the self-expression of God. . . . Both will agree that this *Logos* is the starting point of all things. It exists as it did, *en arche*, in the beginning, at the root of the Universe. Moreover, its very essence is a relationship to God that is truly divine. . . . Thus from the beginning we are to understand that the Word has its whole being within Deity, but that it does not exhaust the being of Deity.

So then in his aim to establish that Jesus Christ is the Son of God St. John uses the word *Logos* as the means of expression, and the phrase *en arche* to show that the existence of the *Logos* was not a temporal event but an eternal reality. Indeed we must measure the meaning, not in terms of Bethlehem to the Mount of Ascension, but from everlasting to everlasting. The *Logos* is seen against the background of eternity. For if our

Lord had no existence prior to His Incarnation, the claim that He came to be the living revelation of God is invalid. So St. John records our Lord's claim of *PRE-EXISTENCE WITH GOD THE FATHER*: "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven" (John iii. 13). Or again: "I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father" (John xvi. 28). Perhaps the most deeply moving passage of all is from John xvii. 5: "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." Other similar passages in support of our Lord's claim occur, such as: "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John viii. 58). He speaks as One on whom time has no effect and no meaning. He is the I AM of Israel. He knows no past, he knows no future. He is unbeginning and unending Being, He is the eternal "Now". If we turn to the Book of the Revelation, we have a remarkable phrase used both of God the Father and God the Son, which further emphasises Christ's pre-existence with the Father. In Rev. i. 8 (R.V.) we read: "I am the Alpha, and the Omega, saith the Lord God." Here it is the Lord God who is the Alpha and Omega. In Rev. xxii. 13, 16: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. I, Jesus, have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches" (cf. Rev. i. 17 and Isa. xlv. 6). In these two passages we observe that the identical phrase is used of both the Father and the Son in relation to eternity. This is not confined either to the New Testament, for the Old Testament prophets, as they spoke of the Messiah that should come in the fullness of time, used the same language of the everlastingness of the One that should come: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me, that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, *from everlasting*" (Mic. v. 2). So also speaks Isaiah: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, *the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father.*" Arianism, which denied the true Godhead of Christ, might argue a *created* pre-existence. But St. John speaks of "the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth".

Secondly, the claim is made of our Lord's *EQUALITY WITH GOD THE FATHER*. St. John records the words of our Lord, as saying "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him" (John v. 23). Here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, He claims equal right with the Father to the homage of mankind. In consideration of this aspect of Christ's claim, we must bear in mind His acceptance as meet and right of the confessions of Nathanael (John i. 49) and Peter (Matt. xvi. 16), as well as His momentous words to Nicodemus in John iii. 18. Besides these there are the words to Philip in the upper room. In response to Philip's question, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us", our Lord replies: "Have I been so long time with you and thou hast not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" What exactly this indwelling of the Father meant is seen in our Lord's answer to Jude's question: "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world? (John xiv. 23). Jesus answered and said unto Him: If a man love Me, he will keep my words, and My Father will love him and *We* will come unto him and make *Our* abode with him." So He claims to be able to dwell in the heart of man. He associates Himself in oneness with God the Father. A saint might use language implying that he lives in a state of communion with God, but he would realise that he still lived an immeasurable distance from the God who had so enriched and blessed him. His whole being would shrink from any statement which would associate him with God in the way these words do. He would not represent his presence as being co-ordinate with the presence of God the Father, nor would he suggest that, equal with the Father, he was ruler and helper in the life of immortal souls. But our Lord makes these very claims of Himself. He *does* claim equality with God the Father.

Perhaps this is seen even more clearly in the statement he makes that He will judge the world. We have the discourse of Matt. xxv. 31-46, as well as the well-known statements in St. John's Gospel: "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." He states that He will

return to earth as Judge of all mankind. He will sit upon a throne of glory and will be attended by angels. Before Him will be gathered all the nations of the world, and He will judge them. He will thus discharge a function involving moral insight and spiritual discernment of the thoughts and intents of the hearts of countless millions in unshared supremacy. He will place in one of two classes all who appear before Him. They will be destined for endless happiness or woe. There is no suggestion of any case too complex for His own power of decision. There is no case that seems too bad for heaven or too good for hell, and so to be classed separately and receive some sort of intermediate award. The fact that much of his teaching is given in parable, and that therefore His words must not be pressed too literally, still does not alter the claim he makes to be the Judge of all the world. You cannot reflect upon this claim of Christ without feeling either that such a claim ought never to have been made, or else it carries with it the great truth of His Deity. He also claims parity with the Father in working power in that He states He can raise the dead, and indeed demonstrated this on several occasions. He says: "As the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom *He* will" (John v. 21). Again: "The hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live" (John v. 25). We read again that the whole human race would be affected by an act of His will in John v. 28-9. This latter passage is connected again with His function as Judge of all the earth.

An interesting thought comes to mind from which far-reaching deductions may be made concerning these words spoken by our Lord, following the healing on the sabbath day of the impotent man. The Jews had sought to slay our Lord. In justification of His action of healing, He says: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." "Therefore," the Evangelist goes on, "the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the sabbath, but also said that God was His own Father, making Himself equal with God." This shows the Jews were not mistaken in our Lord's meaning. They knew the Everlasting God "neither rests, nor is weary". They knew that if He must continue to maintain the universe which He had created, to slumber would cause this to collapse. They knew that in resting on the seventh day He rested from creating

new things, but that He still had to continue to maintain the life which already existed. In that sense "He worketh hitherto": So they realised that no one could identify himself with this world-sustaining energy of God who was not God himself. They saw that no one could point to God's example of an uninterrupted energy in nature and providence as a reason for seeming to set aside God's positive Law—as Christ had done—without thereby asserting himself to be divine. Our Lord claims the right to break the sabbath because God's ever-active providence is not suspended on that day. Thus Christ places His will and His power on equality with the will and power of God Himself. He might have asserted the miracle of healing the impotent man to be the work of God, of whom He was but a humble instrument. But He does not do so. He claims it to be His own work, and with this goes the claim to be Lord of Nature and to be equal with the Father in operative energy. "Whatsoever things He [the Father] doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John v. 19).

Together with this equality of operative power with the Father, and the equal right of honour from men, goes the claim to absolute *oneness of essential being or essence with the Father*. This is seen in John x, in the references made to the sheep, especially verses 28 and 29. He said He "knew" the sheep. He asserts the blessedness of the sheep. With Him they were secure. No power on earth or in heaven could pluck them out of His hand. Then He goes on: "My Father who gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." How does He consolidate these two reasons for the security of the sheep? By clearly asserting His oneness with the Father: "I and My Father are one thing." Now pause for a moment to consider the quality of this unity. Is it the unity of spiritual communion, or reciprocal love, or participation in an imparted and heaven-sent nature, or the unity of design and co-operation? None of these suggestions will fit the full sense of these words, which represents the hand of the Son as being one with the hand of the Father, in love and power, securing the souls of men in perfect safety for all eternity from eternal ruin. This can mean only a unity of essence. The power of the Son which shields the souls of the redeemed from the enemies of their salvation is the very power of the Father, and this identity of power is shown in oneness of nature. St.

Augustine says of this text, the *unum* saves us from Arianism and the *sumus* is our safeguard from Sabellius. The Son is still Himself; He is not the Father, but the Son. But there is unity of essence. The Father and the Son are one thing. As He asserts in John x. 38: "The Father is in Me and I in Him." It is not the indwelling of God in a holy soul, for no moral quality is here in question, but an identity of power for the performance of superhuman works. Our Lord expresses His identity of nature with the Father by declaring His omnipotence. The Jews understood Him, even if the modernist does not. The Jews sought to destroy Him again, because of His blasphemy, as it sounded to their ears.

We must take some notice of the character of our Lord in considering Him as Son of God, although this is rather more within the range of the subject of the Son of Man. He was holy and sinless. On the grounds of brevity I will not develop this. He was also sincere in all He said and did. He believed what He said without reserve, and He said what He believed without regard to the consequences. When great multitudes were following Him, He turns and tells them that no one can follow Him without taking up the Cross, and without the sacrifice of normal human affections and relationships. He points out candidly that men must count the cost before embarking upon discipleship. When confronted with the young man who hailed Him as "Good Master", He chides him with the words: "Why callest thou Me good? There is none good but One, that is God." When the multitude, which had been miraculously fed, returns seeking Him the following day, He does not accept this as proof of His popularity but tells them bluntly: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles but because ye did eat of the loaves and are filled." When He is on the point of being deserted by all and Peter asserts his willingness to go to prison and to death with Him, our Lord does not accept this affection, but shows Peter the weakness latent in his heart. Many more examples could be recalled to show that Christ never flattered or favoured, but He set forth the truth. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the World, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John xviii. 37). Sincerity is always at the centre of His thoughts and words.

Moreover He was utterly unselfish. He "sought not His own glory". He came not to do His own will. His

self-sacrifice is clear in all His thought, affections and actions. It found its highest expression in His death on the Cross. His relations, His Mother, His reputation, His home, His friends were abandoned for the glory of God. He loved perfectly, for no shadow of selfishness ever sullied that love.

Again He was humble. He was careful that His miracles did not add to His reputation. Often He asks those He healed not to tell others what He had done for them. "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart."

Now if we consider these three aspects of His character, His sincerity, His unselfishness and His humility, in relation to the claims we have seen He makes for Himself, we face a dilemma. If He is not God, was He really humble? Can He claim such prerogatives and not be God? But if He is both Man and God, the language He used falls into place, and is understandable. He is really unselfish, yet He claims for Himself the affections and thoughts of men. He tells them He is to be the centre of their living and thinking. Unless He is divine, this would seem to be selfish self-assertion. He calls men to renounce the world, yet if He be not God He is guilty of requiring honour to be given to Himself. He offered Himself up as the divine Victim, to redeem men, upon the Cross. It was a voluntary sacrifice. Yet if He is not divine, our confidence in the efficacy of this atonement is impaired. For men have risked life for the object of renown. It might be alleged that by self-assertion, He courted death by His words at His trial before the High Priest.

Again, if Christ was not God, can He be said to be sincere? Suppose He was, after all, merely a man, and that the words of Renan are true: "Jésus n'énonce pas un moment l'idée sacrilège qu'il soit Dieu. On ne nie pas qu'il y eût dans les affirmations de Jésus le germe de la doctrine qui devait plus tard faire de lui une hypostase divine" (*Vie de Jésus*, p. 75). That is to say, there was the intertwining of His soul with the Spirit of God in such deep and absorbing communion as to obliterate His sense of being a distinct human personality. Then, granting His sincerity, with what absolute horror He would have recoiled from the awful misunderstanding which had arisen in the minds of His hearers because of the words He had spoken. Immediately we should find Him correcting this misapprehension, "Thou being a man, makest Thyself God"; but nowhere

does He repudiate this claim, for it was true. He underlines it rather than in any way detract from it.

If in this paper I have confined myself mainly to our Lord's claims concerning Himself as Son of God, rather than range at large over the whole of the New Testament, it is because I believe these to be the most important evidence. And if I have mainly concerned myself with the record of St. John, it is not to be supposed that other Apostles held views less strong concerning the Son of God. St. James, for example, in the opening words of His Epistle, says that he stands in the same relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ as he does to God. He applies the word *κύριος* to the God of the Old Testament and to Christ quite impartially. He describes the Lord Jesus Christ as "the Lord of glory" (Jas. ii. 1). In this one short Epistle he reproduces more of the sayings of our Lord than all the other Epistles of the New Testament put together. In St. James's Epistle the Divinity of our Lord is everywhere implied.

St. Peter's view of the Divinity of our Lord is seen in the missionary sermons of Acts, and in his General Epistles. In his missionary sermons he is speaking largely to Jews and stresses the fulfilment in Christ himself, of Old Testament prophecy. He declares the Holy One of Ps. xvi to be Christ (Acts ii. 24-36). He goes on to declare Him both Lord and Christ. In his Epistles, he asserts that it is round the Person of Christ that spiritual life of the Church centres. The Lord Christ is in their hearts, and they are to sanctify him there, as God was sanctified by the worship of Israel (1 Pet. iii. 15). St. Peter lays special stress upon the atoning power of the death of our Lord. He also uses the word *Logos* as St. John does to describe the author of the soul's new birth (1 Pet. i. 23). It is "the *Logos* that liveth and abideth for ever". Again the thought occurs of honour being given to the Name of Jesus, "to whom is the glory and the power unto ages beyond ages" (1 Pet. iv. 11). He is further described as the coming King and Judge. The Apostle proclaims the Deity of our Lord, and also takes it for granted by his implications.

St. Paul's view of Christ stresses the humanity of our Lord. Expressions occur such as "the form of a servant"; "the likeness of sinful flesh"; "the fashion of a man", etc. But in my opinion St. Paul is using such expressions to emphasise the distinction between the Divine Son and the Eternal Father. It

is largely from St. Paul that the Kenosis theory has sprung. To what extent Christ emptied Himself has ever been a matter for serious consideration. To read Col. i. 15-18 is to appreciate St. Paul's belief in the Divinity of our Lord. It is the counterpart to Phil. ii. 6-8. In contrast to the latter we have our Lord described as "the image of the invisible God" and "the first-born of every creature". "All things were created by Him and for Him"; "He is before all things, and by Him all things consist", St. Paul asserts. Now clearly, if Christ's Divinity is to be accepted it must carry with it belief in His infallibility, otherwise God's wisdom can be foolishness and He can rightly be charged with deceiving His creatures. It is illogical and irreverent to maintain that Jesus Christ is God, and then to allege that as a Teacher He was prone to err in that He accepted the common beliefs of His day. It has been asserted that Christ was subject to human infirmities of ignorance and error. In support of this, Luke ii. 52 is quoted as showing how our Lord increased in wisdom and stature. That there was an intellectual development is obviously indicated, and this would correspond to the growth of His human body, but St. John tells us He was "full of truth". This fullness of truth was an element of the glory which the first disciples beheld. He came to the fullness of His Manhood and with it, of knowledge, as is indicated at His Baptism by *ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα*. But it is asserted that Mark xiii. 32, where our Lord declares His ignorance of the Day of Judgment, is indicative of a limitation of knowledge. He says: "Of that day and that hour, knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." An impartial examination of the Greek text will show that the translation is correct, and no other meaning can rightly be deduced. So that it is clear that on this one matter of the Day of Judgment the Lord Jesus Christ declares that He does not know when it is to be. St. Gregory Nazianzen comments on this: "To whom can it be a matter of doubt that Christ has a knowledge of that hour as God, but says that He is ignorant of it as man?" St. Cyril of Alexandria asserts that our Lord's ignorance as Man of this event is in keeping with the whole economy of the Incarnation. As God Christ did know the Day of Judgment but it was consistent with the law of self-humiliation, prescribed by His infinite love, that He should assume all the conditions of real humanity and therefore, with the rest, a limitation of

knowledge. In considering this statement by St. Cyril, it is well to remember that he was an uncompromising opponent of Nestorianism, with its denial of the unity of the Person of Christ, and that he was an advocate of hypostatic union.

If we accept a limitation of our Lord's knowledge on this particular occasion and on this particular subject, it leads to one conclusion only, namely that the human soul of Christ was restricted in its knowledge in this one instance. It is not possible to go further than that without entering the realm of conjecture with its attendant pitfalls. For on other occasions there is abundant proof to show that He had perfect knowledge beyond the reach of sense. So He knew the thoughts of Judas, the traitor; the secret communings of the disciples on the road to Capernaum (Luke ix. 47); He shows that He has knowledge of the future on several occasions; He claims knowledge of the contingent future, in that he asserts that Tyre and Sidon would have repented *if* they had had the opportunities afforded to Bethsaida and Chorazin. Such knowledge which implies a vast grasp of motives and circumstances *must* suggest Divinity. The conclusion reached by the Apostles is expressed by St. Peter: "Lord, Thou knowest all things" (John xxi. 17). "As the Father knoweth Me, even so I know the Father" (John x. 15), says our Lord; and again: "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father; and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him" (Luke x. 22). These statements, taken in conjunction with the passage concerning the Day of Judgment, show that this latter was an exceptional restriction. We are unable to grasp the reason which caused our Lord to deny to His human soul on one special occasion, the knowledge of one special fact. It may be compared with the way He denied Himself the comfort of Deity, when He hung on the Cross. We have no right to infer that He was ever ignorant of anything else, or even that He was *at other times* ignorant of the Judgment Day. So that St. Paul's great statement in Col. ii. 3, "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge", must be understood to apply to His earthly life in time, as well as to His existence in eternity.

So we see the agreement of the Apostles and their absolute assertion of the Deity of Christ.

Finally, the Epistle to the Hebrews describes our Lord as

Master of the angels who are ministers of His divine Will. He, in His glory above the heavens, is vested with attributes which the highest angel could never claim. In His crucified, but now glorified humanity He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high as heir of all things. By Him the universe was made and at this moment is maintained by His Almighty Word. The majestic and mighty triumph of His Kingdom is certain and sure.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high . . . Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy Kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows. And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thine hands; they shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same and Thy years shall not fail.

Before the splendour of the divine Person of our glorious and living Lord we must bow in awe and wonder, in humility and praise. He is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever". What He was to the saints of old, He is to the saints today. What He was to our fathers, He is to us and will be to our children. As now we see in a glass darkly, so one day we shall see the King in His beauty, and be for ever satisfied.

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